

The Metropolitan Life Survey of The American Teacher

1998

Building Family-School Partnerships: Views of Teachers and Students

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by
Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

Project Directors:
Katherine Binns, *Senior Vice President*
Alan Steinberg, *Research Director*
Stacey Amorosi, *Research Associate*

LOUIS HARRIS AND ASSOCIATES, INC.
111 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10003
(212) 539-9600

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INTRODUCTION

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

I. Students' Perceptions of Parental Involvement in Education

1. Most students report that their parents are at least somewhat involved with their education, and most would like them to remain as involved with their education as they currently are, but they do not want them to become more involved.

- 40% say that their parents are very involved with their education, and 43% say they are somewhat involved.
- Only 14% of the students would like their parents to become more involved with their education, and 68% would like them to remain as involved as they currently are.

2. Students who have trouble in school - - getting grades below C - - are less likely than others to say their parents are involved in their education. They are also less likely to say they would like their parents to be more involved in their education.

- 25% of the students who mostly get grades below C report that their parents are not involved with their education.
- 56% of African American students compared to 37% of white students report that their parents are very involved with their education.
- African American and Hispanic students are more likely than white students (22% and 26% vs. 11%) to want their parents to become more involved with their education.
- One-third (32%) of the students who usually get grades below C would like their parents to be less involved with their education.

3. Most students feel that their parents encourage them to do well in school and that they provide them with the practical support necessary to succeed in school. Students who have trouble academically, however, are less likely than the academically inclined to feel that their parents provide them with this sort of encouragement and support.

- The vast majority (94%) of students report that their parents encourage them to do well in school.
- Nine out of ten students who mostly get C's or better (97% A/B Mostly, 93% B/C Mostly) in their classes are encouraged by their parents to do well in school. In contrast to this, only three in four (77%) students who mostly get grades lower than C say that their parents offer them this sort of encouragement.
- Three in five (62%) students report that their parents help them find the time and place to study, and one in three (33%) reports that they do not receive this sort of help.
- 45% of the students who usually get class grades worse than C do not receive help finding the time and place to study.
- Nearly three in five (57%) students report that their parents help them go over their homework assignments.
- 50% of the students who usually get class grades lower than C report that their parents do not help them go over their homework. In contrast to this, 60% of the students who mostly get A's and B's and 55% of those who mostly get B's and C's report that their parents do help them go over their homework assignments.
- Students whose parents are either not very or not at all involved with their education, are more than two times as likely as students whose parents are either very or somewhat involved with their education (70% vs. 33%) to report that their parents do not help them go over their homework.
- Most (84%) students report that their parents are available to help with schoolwork when they need it.
- Students who get mostly A's and B's (87%) are more likely than others to report that their parents are available to help them with their schoolwork when needed. One-quarter (24%) of the students who usually receive grades lower than C report that their parents are not available for help with schoolwork.

4. Students who are having academic difficulties are less likely to feel that their parents are interested in their daily lives or in their aspirations for the future. There is a strong association between the level of parental involvement in

education and the extent to which parents take an interest in other aspects of their children's lives.

- Overall, three out of four (73%) students say their parents find the time to talk with them about their school lives.
- 78% of the students who usually receive A's and B's for class grades report that their parents find the time to talk to them about their school lives. Half (49%) of those students who mostly get grades lower than C report that their parents do not find the time for conversations about their school lives.
- Nine in ten (87%) students' parents encourage them to go to college. No significant difference exists between the amount of parental encouragement to go to college that white boys and girls (84% vs. 89%) and minority boys and girls (81% vs. 89%) receive.
- 54% of the students whose parents are either not very or not at all involved with their education report that their parents do not take time to talk with them about their school lives. Four in five (79%) students whose parents are either very or somewhat involved with their education have such conversations with their parents.
- Four in five (84%) students say they receive parental encouragement to pursue their dreams.
- Students who usually receive A's and B's (89%) for class grades are the most likely to receive parental encouragement to pursue their dreams. One-quarter (27%) of those students who mostly get worse than C's report that their parents do not encourage them to pursue their dreams.

II. Teachers' Perceptions of Parental Involvement in Education

1. Teacher perceptions of the amount of parental support shown for their schools have not changed since 1987. Most teachers would like to see the level of parental involvement in their schools increase. Inner city teachers remain critical of the level of parental support shown for their schools; nearly all of them would like parents to become more involved.

- Ten years ago, one in five (17%) teachers felt that parental support was excellent, and two in five (40%) felt that it was good. Today, one in five (19%) feels that it is excellent, and two in five (44%) feel that it is good.

- Four of five suburban teachers feel that the parental support for their schools is either excellent (29%) or good (50%).
- Nearly two in three inner city teachers feel that the parental support shown for their schools is either fair (33%) or poor (31%).
- 83% of teachers would like to see the level of parental involvement in their schools increase.
- 95% of inner city teachers would like to see the level of parental involvement in their schools increase.

2. Teacher perceptions of parent-teacher relations and the frequency of contact with parents have changed little over the past decade. Teachers, except for those working in inner city schools, give positive ratings to parent-teacher relations.

- Other urban (70%), suburban (82%), small town (72%) and rural (76%) teachers mostly give parent-teacher relations positive ratings.
- Teachers working in inner city schools mostly give ratings of fair (44%) and poor (11%).
- In 1987, 25% were very satisfied and half (47%) were somewhat satisfied with the frequency of contact with parents. Today, 30% are very satisfied and half (48%) are somewhat satisfied.
- Suburban (36% very, 49% somewhat), small town (27% very, 53% somewhat) and rural (34% very, 46% somewhat) teachers are all about equally satisfied with the frequency of contact they have with their students' parents. Only two in three urban teachers are either very (24%) or somewhat (43%) satisfied.

3. Overall, parents today are perceived by teachers to be more readily available and responsive when contact is necessary than they were ten years ago. Many teachers working in inner city schools, however, have not found this to be true.

- In 1987, half of the secondary teachers felt that the availability and responsiveness of parents was either excellent (14%) or good (38%). Today, 16% feel that it is excellent and 47% feel that it is good.

- Ratings given by teachers working in suburban (71% 1997 vs. 58% 1987), small town (66% 1997 vs. 49% 1987) and rural (69% 1997 vs. 53% 1987) schools are significantly more positive today than in 1987.
- Two in five inner city teachers give parent availability and responsiveness ratings of fair (38%) and poor (23%).

4. More teachers today than a decade ago feel that parental involvement in education should occur both in the school and in the home. Most public school students share this view.

- In 1987, one in four (24%) teachers felt that parental involvement in education should take place in both the school and the home, and today, 35% of the teachers hold this view.
- Today, one in three (32%) suburban teachers, compared to one in five (19%) a decade ago, believes that parent involvement in education should occur in the school and in the home.
- Half (52%) of all minority teachers feel that it is important for parental involvement in education to take place in the school. Only two in five (39%) white teachers share this view.
- 72% of students think that it is a good idea for parents to be involved with their children's schools.
- High school students are more likely than students in seventh and eighth grades (75% vs. 67%) to believe that it is a good for parents to be involved with their children's schools.
- 63% of students believe that it is important for parents to be involved in education in both the school and the home, 34% feel that parental involvement in education should mainly take place in the home, and 3% feel that it should take place in the school itself.
- Girls are more likely than boys (71% vs. 56%) to believe that parental involvement in education should take place in both places, and boys are more likely than girls (41% vs. 27%) to feel that it should mainly take place in the home.

III. Encouraging Parental Involvement in Schools

1. Teachers' perceptions on how well schools do at encouraging parental involvement in educational and non-educational areas have either improved or stayed the same over the past ten years. Teachers working in urban schools feel their schools are doing a better job of encouraging parental involvement. Students' tend to be more critical than teachers of their schools' performance.

- Today, four in five (81%) secondary teachers feel that their schools do a good job of encouraging parental involvement in educational areas. In 1987, 74% felt this way.
- Today, eight in ten (79%) teachers working in urban schools feel that their schools do a good job of encouraging parental involvement in educational areas, compared with seven in ten (69%) a decade ago.
- Two in five (41%) students feel that their schools do not do a good job of encouraging parental involvement in the classroom. One in three (33%) feels that they do.
- 47% of all students attending suburban schools feel that their schools do not do a good job of encouraging parental involvement in the classroom.
- Today, 85% of teachers feel that their schools do a good job of encouraging parental involvement in non-subject areas. 83% of teachers felt this way in 1987.
- 54% of all students feel their schools do a good job encouraging parental involvement in non-subject areas. Three in ten (28%) students disagree with this.
- In 1987, 70% of secondary teachers disagreed with the notion that schools only contact parents when there is a problem with their child. Today three in four (74%) teachers disagree with this.
- 65% of students believe that schools only contact parents when there is a problem with their child. One in four (23%) students does not believe this to be the case.
- Three in five (57%) students believe that their schools offer parents opportunities for meaningful roles. One in five (18%) students disagrees with this.

2. Even though teachers are more likely to favor a wider range of parental involvement in education than they were ten years ago, they are still evenly split over how much say parents should have in policy decisions affecting the classroom. Students feel that parents should have a voice in such decisions.

- A slight majority of teachers still feel that parents should just be kept informed (53% 1997, 53% 1987) rather than actively consulted (44% 1997, 45% 1987) about changes in the subjects taught.
- 55% of the teachers working in communities with the lowest estimated median income believe that parents should be actively consulted about changes in the subjects taught.

- A quarter (26%) of the students believe that parents should have a lot of say in decisions regarding subjects taught, and half (53%) believe that they should have some say. Less than one in five (17%) feel that they should have no say.
- Students in suburban schools (21%) are the least likely and students in urban schools (31%) are the most likely to believe that parents should have a lot of input in such decisions.
- 55% of secondary school teachers believe parents should just be kept informed about changes in homework policy, and two in five (43%) think that they should be actively consulted. In 1987, 59% favored keeping parents informed and 38% favored active consultation.
- One in five (19%) students feels that parents should have a lot of say in decisions affecting homework assignments, two in five (41%) feel that they should have some say, and 35% feel that they should have no say.
- Today, teachers are as evenly split as they were ten years ago over the issue of whether parents should be actively consulted (52% 1997, 51% 1987) or just kept informed (47% 1997, 48% 1987) about changes in extra-curricular activities.
- One in four (27%) students feels that parents should have a lot of say in decisions regarding extra-curricular activities, half (49%) feel that they should have some say, and one in five (19%) feels that they should have no say.
- Today three in five (61%) teachers believe that parents should be actively consulted about changes in the discipline policy, and two in five (38%) believe that they need only be kept informed. In 1987, 56% felt that they should be actively consulted, and 43% felt that they should just be kept informed.
- Minority teachers (74%) are the most likely to believe that parents need to be actively consulted about disciplinary policy changes.
- Two in five (38%) students feel that parents should have a lot of say, one in three (36%) feels that they should have some say, and 20% feel that they should have no say in disciplinary decisions made by schools.

3. In spite of the fact that a sizable proportion of teachers believe that parents need only be kept informed about school policy changes, the majority are in favor of including parents on committees that oversee school policies.

- Today, nearly nine in ten teachers feel that involving parents on a management team to determine school policies would be either very (42%) or somewhat (44%) valuable. A decade ago, only 25% felt that such a team would be very valuable, and half (52%) felt that it would be somewhat valuable.
- A decade ago, one in five (19%) teachers thought that parental involvement on committees that decide the curriculum of the school would be very valuable, and 45% thought that it would be somewhat valuable. Today, 25% believe that this would be very valuable, and half (49%) believe that it would be somewhat valuable.
- Ten years ago, most teachers believed that it would be either very (59%) or somewhat (34%) valuable to have parents do volunteer work to help out at schools. Today, 70% believe that it would be very valuable and nearly three in ten (28%) believe that this would be somewhat valuable.

IV. Some Commonly Made Criticisms of Parents

1. Over the past ten years, teacher views on a series of commonly made criticisms of parents have not changed substantially. In general, teachers appear more critical of parents than students do.

- The majority of teachers feel that either most (15% 1997, 14% 1987) or many (39% 1997, 41% 1987) parents take too little interest in their children's education.
- The majority (67%) of students feel that some parents take too little interest in their children's education. One in ten (11%) feel that this is true of most parents, and 15% feel that this is true of hardly any parents.
- Half of the secondary teachers feel that most (14% 1997, 16% 1987) or many (36% 1997, 41% 1987) parents fail to motivate their children so that they want to learn in school.
- One in five (17%) students feel that most parents fail to motivate their children so that they want to learn, half (52%) feel that this is true of some parents, and another one in five (19%) feels that this is true of hardly any parents.
- Today, one in seven teachers feels that most (14% 1997, 16% 1987) parents fail to discipline their children, and two in five (42% 1997, 38% 1987) feel that many fail at this.

- One in five (19%) students believes that hardly any parents fail to discipline their children, just over half (55%) believe that some parents fail at this, and 16% feel that most parents fail to do this.
- The most frequently cited obstacle that teachers believe students face when it comes to doing schoolwork at home is uninvolved parents and lack of parental support (20%).

2. Today, fewer urban teachers than in 1987 are critical of the role that parents take with regard to their children's education.

- Today a smaller proportion of teachers working in urban schools think that most or many parents take too little interest in their children's education than ten years ago (61% vs. 73%).
- Today only half of the teachers working in urban schools feel that most (18%) or many (35%) parents fail to motivate their children to want to learn, whereas a decade ago, two in three believed this to be true of many (46%) or most (22%).

3. Overall, most students feel that their parents are at least somewhat helpful when they are having problems with their school lives or their personal lives.

- 85% of students feel that their parents are either very (44%) or somewhat (41%) helpful when they ask for help with their schoolwork.
- Minority boys (60%) are the most likely to report that their parents are very helpful when they seek help with their schoolwork.
- Four out of five students feel that their parents are either very (46%) or somewhat (36%) helpful when they ask for help with problems they are having with their teachers or classmates.
- African American students (59%) are the most likely to classify their parents as very helpful when it comes to problems with their teachers and classmates.
- 50% of all secondary school students feel that their parents are very helpful when they ask for help with an emotional difficulty, and 30% feel that their parents are somewhat helpful.
- Girls are more likely than boys (55% vs. 44%) to feel that their parents are very helpful when they ask for help with emotional problems. Minority girls (65%), in

particular, are the most likely to describe their parents as very helpful in such situations.

- Students who usually get C's or better in their classes are more likely than those students who usually get worse than C (52% A/B mostly and 48% B/C mostly vs. 34% worse than C) to feel that their parents are very helpful when they are having emotional difficulties.
- One-third (34%) of all secondary students who mostly get class grades worse than C report that their parents are not helpful when they are experiencing emotional difficulties.
- Students whose parents are either very or somewhat involved with their education are more likely than those whose parents are either not very or not at all involved with their education to report that their parents are helpful (84% vs. 56%) when they seek help with any emotional difficulties they might have.